

WorkFirst Partners for Change

Follow-up Q&A

As of May 31, 2006

At the Partners for Change meeting on February 9, 2006, the SubCabinet 2 hosted a Question-and-Answer period allowing local leaders and managers to ask questions about the upcoming policy changes related to Governor Gregoire's Directive to Implement WorkFirst Reform. Because information was limited at that time, the unanswered questions were assigned to The Operational Partners (TOP) for appropriate responses. The following responses have been reviewed and approved by the SubCabinet 2.

Sub 2 would appreciate continuing dialog and ideas from local staff in identifying issues and potential solutions. Comments are welcome by emailing workfirst@ofm.wa.gov.

The questions are categorized as follows:

- Upfront Engagement – Positive Prevention Services
- Comprehensive Evaluation (CE)
- Non-Compliance Sanction
- Intensive Services
- Bundling Services
- Job Search
- Increased Education
- Community Jobs
- LEP Pathway
- Local Area Planning
- Performance, Accountability and GMAP
- General

Upfront Engagement – Positive Prevention Services

1. **What does “upfront engagement” mean? Answer:** WorkFirst engagement is all about building a rapport with each parent, one-on-one, and getting them directly involved in making decisions. This is the time staff should start sending a consistent, positive message about what WorkFirst can offer, the parent's responsibilities, and the importance of getting a job to support their children.

WorkFirst engagement is designed to

- Build a positive working relationship
- Engage and motivate
- Show “what's in it for you”
- Demonstrate how participation is an opportunity
- Give information so the parent can be an active partner in making decisions

2. **How will “Diversion” be measured if Diversion Cash Assistance is not actually issued? What if the family gets WCCC, Basic Food or Child Support access? Answer:** DSHS Headquarters staff are pursuing several options to track this information without additional workload for staff. More details will be available after all options have been reviewed.
3. **How long does it take to get an Unemployment Insurance (UI) Eligibility Determination? Answer:** Parents with recent work history who apply for cash benefits will be asked to file a UI claim by telephone at 1-800-318-6022. Filing by telephone is the most efficient way to ensure all wages are considered. The same day the parent applies for UI, his/her determination will be mailed to them.

For parents who worked in other states, the UI worker can either file the claim or direct them to a phone number for the state they are filing against. See new UI section of Chapter 1.5 in the WorkFirst handbook (http://www1.dshs.wa.gov/ESA/wfhand/1_5.htm)

4. **Are there plans to strengthen the Pregnancy to Employment (PTE) Pathway? Answer:** This is an issue SubCabinet 2 heard about repeatedly from Local Planning Area members at the March/April 2006 regional partnership meetings. Sub 2 has requested briefing papers be prepared to identify current issues and potential solutions. In the meantime, the Comprehensive Evaluation will expose new and pregnant parents with the opportunities available early in the process, and more parents may see the benefit of

engaging in skill building activities, such as basic education, or other meaningful activities during pregnancy or for the one-year exemption period as a result.

5. **Are there plans to look at the current support services contracts and their effectiveness to expand the types of services available?** **Answer:** There are no changes pending to the Support Services policy. CSD Regional WorkFirst contracts to purchase clients services are reviewed at the beginning of each program year to ensure the services we purchase are outcome-driven and meet the needs of the WorkFirst parents or individuals. In addition, we are waiting to hear about federal TANF changes to evaluate what new tools may be needed.
6. **Why is child support was not included as a positive preventative option or an alternative assistance program during upfront engagement?** **Answer:** It is included. Child Support is a vital piece of this best practice in providing families with options. This strategy focuses on linking families to other services that can meet their needs. These standard services include:
 - Diversion Cash Assistance
 - Basic Food
 - Medical Assistance
 - Child Support
 - Child Care
 - Unemployment Benefits
 - Connection to employment services
 - Other community resources such as housing, food banks, energy assistance, etc.

Comprehensive Evaluation (CE)

7. **What happens if someone just wants help finding a job? Can he/she refuse the CE process?** **Answer:** No, they must complete the CE prior to entering any of the participation pathways. Refer to the [CE Standards](#).
8. **How will information be provided for case managers to make decisions?** **Answer:** All information gathered through the CE will be available through eJAS to all partners. The case managers will receive recommendations for employment pathways from ESD via the employment plan documented in the CE eJAS screens.
9. **Many WorkFirst parents have issues related to family violence or substance abuse. Will that sensitive information be shared with the partners during the CE?** **Answer:** Yes. The Comprehensive Evaluation is a multi-agency approach to determining the most appropriate pathway for WorkFirst parents. On June 1, policy and automation are being modified so that this type of critical information can be shared when needed by the partners during the CE process. Additional communication about this change is available in a May 24, 2006, memo entitled "Sharing Confidential Information Needed to Help Parents Succeed."
10. **Is there any training for staff being planned?** **Answer:** Partnership training was conducted in April and May. Agency-specific trainings will be provided prior to implementation. Contact your headquarters' office for more specific information about the agency-specific trainings. Additionally, we are working to develop ongoing training as new staff/partners begin.
11. **Who will help parents' access child care in order to participate in the CE?** **Answer:** Stressing the importance of having reliable, safe child care early in the WorkFirst process is vital to many parents' successful completion of the Comprehensive Evaluation. The parent should learn about Working Connections Child Care as a support service during the time CSO staff discuss Positive Prevention options. The information should include a WCCC child care worker contact for on-going child care services, how to obtain a WCCC application, and how to reach the Child Care Resource and Referral Agency. When the appropriate information is gathered to determine eligibility, WCCC can be authorized to ensure the parent's successful entry and completion of the CE.
12. **Is the employment plan the sole responsibility of ESD or is it a partnership recommendation as to pathway?** **Answer:** ESD will develop the Employment Plan based on all of the CE information from the

partners and input from the parent. Refer to the [CE Standards](#) and [Partner Roles and Responsibilities](#) documents.

13. **We have concerns about the balance of resources required for “assessing and evaluating” during the CE. How will we be able to support pathway activities with existing resources being redirected to support the CE?** **Answer:** Decision-makers will continue to look at staffing needs as the program or caseload shifts. In the meantime, however, WorkFirst partners’ top leaders have committed to making their part of the Comprehensive Evaluation a reality.
14. **How long do we have to complete the CE?** **Answer:** The entire process, from date of application, conducting the comprehensive evaluation, interpretation of the results, writing an IRP based on the results and having the parent begin participation in an employment pathway, will be 30 calendar days or less. More specifically, it will take an average of 11 days from application until eligibility is determined. The comprehensive evaluation, from completion of the foundation portion through the completion of the employment plan with recommendations for employment pathways, will take 10 business days. Refer to the [CE Standards](#) document for more information.
15. **What is the definition of “client choice”? Let’s say, for example, a parent has a broken foot and a doctor’s note that excuses them from activities. The parent chooses not to participate, but could benefit from job search, training, Community Jobs, etc. Can they choose not to participate?** **Answer:** If a parent has medical verification that they are unable to participate in specific activities, they will not be required to participate in those activities. However, it is very important that we ask for verification that specifies what the parent is unable to do. While a parent may have medical verification that says they are unable to do a specific activity, there may still be activities they can do and a plan should be developed around those activities.
16. **As part of the CE, is there one intake form (basic information) that all partners can view to ease duplication?** **Answer:** Yes. A comprehensive evaluation documentation section is being programmed into eJAS. It will facilitate the CE process and provide space for each partner to document the results of the CE evaluations and options explored with the parents. Refer to the [CE Standards](#) and [Partner Roles and Responsibilities](#) documents.
17. **It appears that the CE process responsibilities are divided among a lot of partner agencies. Who puts this all together to come up with the employment plan?** **Answer:** Upon completion of the CE and consultation with partner agency staff as needed, ESD will conduct a one-on-one meeting with the parent to discuss the interpretation of the results, the local labor market, and options for an employment pathway. ESD staff will then complete an employment plan with recommendations for participation. Refer to the [CE Standards](#) and the [Partner Roles and Responsibilities](#) documents.
18. **What happens to a parent who has a documented need based on an assessment, and there are very limited resources to develop a plan to address those needs (for example, learning disabilities)?** **Answer:** There may be opportunities in your local community to maximize resources. Community- and faith-based organizations may be helpful in providing services. In addition, discussions with your Local Area Planning partners may yield ideas not previously explored.
19. **How will transportation be addressed during the CE (no car, no public transportation)?** **Answer:** Studies indicate the lack of transportation and child care are the most immediate barriers to participation in WorkFirst. As a result, those issues must be addressed earlier than ever before -- as part of the upfront Positive Prevention Services conducted by DSHS staff. Your local Comprehensive Evaluation plan described how support services such as transportation and child care would be handled in your local area. Some LPAs will need to continue to develop more specific strategies in these areas.
20. **Given the increased level of customer service the CE requires, how will it be financed across agencies (i.e. staff training in career development, additional staff-to-customer time)?** **Answer:** While no new resources are available for service delivery of the Comprehensive Evaluation, you are encouraged to be innovative while staying within the published CE standards. Your local CE Plan, signed by the local mandatory partners, will address how you deliver CE services to parents in remote areas.

21. **How will the results of the CE demonstrate the need for additional resources and supports for parent employment success and self-sufficiency?** **Answer:** In her *Directive to Implement WorkFirst Reform*, Governor Gregoire outlined her goals:
- Improve the ability of families to achieve economic self-sufficiency sooner.
 - Ensure the program is financially secure.
 - Provide a framework for continuous program improvement through enhanced accountability and performance.
- WorkFirst leadership will monitor the flow of parents' engagement, activities, and outcomes. If additional resources are warranted based on evidence-based data, leadership will consider its options, which may include shifting resources, using savings from caseload reduction, and requesting additional resources.
22. **Do we know cost-to-system impact of these steps? Do we know how much it costs to put a WorkFirst parent in employed status?** **Answer:** WorkFirst has measured its outcomes and processes since its inception in 1997, and that will not change. As the Comprehensive Evaluation is implemented, data will be gathered and analyzed in order to make the program as efficient and cost-effective as possible.
23. **What document will be used to develop the Employment Plan?** **Answer:** ESD staff will use the current Employment Plan in CATS. The information will be transferred automatically from the employment plan into the eJAS CE documentation screens so that all of the partners can view it.
24. **What is the process for interpretation of the evaluation results? Will all partners look/meet together to make final recommendations? How flexible is the interpretation by "all partners"? We have three CSOs in three cities and one college.** **Answer:** The ESD worker, who will rely on the documentation from the other partners, will do the interpretation and development of recommendations one-on-one with the parent. ESD will confer with the partners as necessary, but there is no expectation that all partners must meet for each interpretation. Refer to the [CE Standards](#) and the [CE Criteria and Parent Involvement](#) documents.
25. **Do we have flexibility at DSHS to send WorkFirst parents to a Work Skill Evaluation prior to CASAS?** **Answer:** Yes. It will depend on your local design and resource availability. Most importantly, you must meet the CE Standards. Refer to the [CE Standards](#) document.
26. **To truly make a plan that addresses the parent's needs, CASAS and Choices assessments provide some insight into a person's abilities and interests. Where is the part of the evaluation that takes into consideration family dynamics, motivation and barriers, and provides support, encouragement and guidance?** **Answer:** The goal of the CE is to provide better information for increased engagement and better results for parents. The foundation portion of the CE focuses on family situations and specific needs and issues. An increased focus on engaging parents and making interactions with them relevant and encouraging is part of the culture change that is occurring within WorkFirst. You may also refer to the [CE Plan](#), [CE Standards](#) and the [Partner Roles and Responsibilities](#) documents.
27. **What if a WorkFirst parent wants to participate by going directly to Job Search and doesn't want to do the CE? Do we sanction?** **Answer:** Hopefully, parents will see the value of the CE as we explain the details of what they will find out about themselves and their fit in the labor market. It is the program's intention to engage parents in the activities and market them so they understand the benefit from participating. However, if a parent chooses not to participate as required, he or she is subject to the sanction rules.
28. **What does the CE process look like for "returners"?** **Answer:** The CE process for returners (defined as those who are coming back to WorkFirst within six months of exiting) begins with a special set of questions that helps to determine the reasons the parent is returning to WorkFirst, in which WorkFirst activities the parent previously participated, etc. Returners will be referred to the CE, and the expert agency partner staff will determine if new testing is necessary, i.e., college staff will determine if a new CASAS test should be conducted, or ESD will determine if a new Work Skills Assessment should be done.

The intention is to connect returners with activities that will help them progress. Refer to the [CE Standards](#) document.

29. **Based on the CE flow, the completion of the education and employability assessments are separate (by colleges and ESD). Does this mean the results go to the case manager (in eJAS) as separate results/recommendations and the case manager makes the final determination? Answer:** No. The recommendations based on the CE process will come to the case manager through the Employment Plan, which will be completed by ESD staff. The case manager will make the final decision regarding participation with the parent based on the recommendations in the Employment Plan. Refer to the [CE Standards](#) and the [CE Criteria and Parent Involvement](#) documents.
30. **Do you envision the CE process happening daily? Some WorkSource/College/DSHS in rural areas have limited staff at separate locations. Answer:** It will depend on your local partner resources and availability. The only requirement is to provide the evaluation elements often enough to meet the needs of the caseload. Refer to the [CE Standards](#) and the [CE Plan](#) documents.
31. **Are we setting up our staff to have disagreements on the Employment Plan? Answer:** Decisions for activities will be based on objective approval criteria, including the local labor market, which will eliminate much of the “disagreement” potential. The intention is to make the best fit for services for each parent. There may be more than one viable option. In these cases, the parent’s input will weigh heavily in the planning. Refer to the [CE Standards](#) and the [CE Criteria & Parent Involvement](#) documents.
32. **Will there be a different, more positive approach to the CE Foundation questions? Answer:** The CE Foundation questions have been re-written to be “open-ended” where more information on the parent can be gathered. Refer to the [CE Standards](#) and [Partner Roles and Responsibilities](#) documents.
33. **What are recommended steps/actions when a parent does not follow through with the CE process? Answer:** Parents who do not follow through will be subject to the sanction process. The goal is to engage parents in meaningful activities rather than sanction, but sanction is the course to take when a parent chooses not to participate as required.
34. **How is the CE process going to support “quicker” engagement? Under this new model we refer to partners for assessments prior to developing an IRP for active engagement. How long do we give the client to engage in the assessment process? How will this affect our performance expectations? Answer:** The CE will allow parents to become aware of the many activities and options available as close to the time of application as possible. This will allow them to make better connections with the most appropriate activities early in the process. Parents will be referred to the CE directly upon determination of WorkFirst eligibility. We expect performance to increase as parents are better matched with activities they see themselves benefiting from.
35. **Are there current examples of partnerships that are doing the CE in an effective manner that reduces duplication? Answer:** Wenatchee, Renton and Columbia River are all “CE test sites” and may have some “promising practices” that could be shared. Refer to the LPA Contacts List at <http://www.workfirst.wa.gov/local/contacts04.htm> for contact information. In addition, we will continue to share information learned from each of the sites as the CE process is fully implemented.
36. **What criteria will be used to assist case managers in placement of parents in the most appropriate program, and provide consistency across the state? Answer:** DSHS case managers and ESD employment specialists both have to consider the criteria in their respective responsibilities.

ESD will apply the approval criteria when developing the employment plan and based on all of the information. Case managers then must apply the criteria to the development of the IRP, especially when the IRP differs from the recommendation made by ESD. Refer to the [CE Criteria & Parent Involvement](#) document.
37. **How do we ensure consistency in the way parents are served between large vs. small offices? Answer:** The WorkFirst Reform requires every new WorkFirst applicant to receive a CE starting June 1, 2006. Consistency will be measured based on the CE Standards. It is expected that there will be

differences between large and small offices based on the local partnership and available resources. Refer to the [CE Standards](#), the [CE Plan](#) and the [CE Criteria & Parent Involvement](#) documents.

38. **We are asking many staff to take on some new skill-based duties during the CE process for which they may not have the proper skills. What kind of training are we going to provide staff so they are comfortable and successful during the CE process?** **Answer:** Staff training has been developed and scheduled for all partner agency staff, including the specific requirements of the CE process. In addition, there are plans to continue training staff over the long-term focusing on the skills and techniques needed to better engage with parents and build communication with them.

Non-Compliance Sanction (NCS)

39. **What happens to customers who absolutely refuse to address their barrier to employment?** **Answer:** After repeated attempts by the WorkFirst partners to engage the parent, a Non-Compliance Sanction case staffing, and a review by a statewide panel, the family will lose its grant. Medical and basic food assistance will still be available to the family.
40. **How does the NCS affect those on WorkFirst more than 60 months?** **Answer:** To make the new policy more clear for WorkFirst families, a sanction before and after 60 months is the same. Those parents in sanction and on WorkFirst more than 60 months (formerly known as Child SafetyNet) will be subject to the same policy as those on less than 60 months (i.e. repeated attempts to engage in the program's offerings, a NCS case staffing, and review by a statewide panel before their cash grant is terminated).
41. **What is the NCS State Review Panel? Who sits on the panel?** **Answer:** In her November 2005 Directive to Reform WorkFirst Reform, Governor Gregoire mandated that before terminating a Non-Compliant Sanctioned family's cash grant, the recommendation must be reviewed so no decision was made by a single individual. As a result, a three-person panel will conduct an external review of each case. The panel will consist of the Director of DSHS's Employment and Assistance Programs (or his/her designee), the director of ESD's WorkSource Operations (or his/her designee) and an external third party contracted with by the Office of Financial Management. The panel will determine whether the state followed all policies and procedures and addressed all identified barriers. The role of the panel is not to second-guess a workers' evaluation – they are only looking to see if the caseworker has addressed all barriers. Therefore, clear, complete documentation is critical.
42. **What are the "safeguards" to protect the most vulnerable? What happens to the children when a parent is terminated?** **Answer:** With the Non Compliant Sanction (NCS) policy, many safeguards are in place to ensure the sanction is appropriate. As with our current sanction policy, a good cause determination and case staffing are required prior to placing a family in sanction. If the family has an open case with the Children's Administration, they will be invited to attend the case staffing. The case staffing is built around encouraging participation, client strengths, and the benefits of participation and the parent will have an opportunity to build a new IRP. Supervisory approval is required to place a family in sanction. If the family remains in sanction, there will be ongoing attempts to re-engage the parent such as monthly phone calls, letters or home visits. If they remain in sanction for 4 months, another case staffing is required involving our partners and anyone the parent would like to bring. Again, Children's Administration will be invited if they are also working with the family. An added component to this case staffing is conducting a child safety plan which includes talking to the parent about their plans to support their children, is the family linked to other state programs they are eligible for and encouraging the family to participate if the plan is not sufficient. If the client does not show for this case staffing, we will attempt at least one home visit. If the family remains in sanction, the case will be sent to a sanction review panel (only with CSOA approval) to review for possible termination. If after all these measures are taken and the sanction is deemed appropriate, the case will be closed (after 6 consecutive months in sanction).

As always, parents have a responsibility to take good care of and provide for their children. Repeated attempts will be made to engage parents with the WorkFirst program's offerings. If, however, the parents continue to refuse to participate, the cash grant will be terminated. Other government programs are available to help when the parent will not do so.

43. **What happens to the application of the parent who leaves WorkFirst in sanction, but reapplies and has to participate for four weeks to cure the sanction?** **Application processing requires a 30-day**

time frame. Answer: The application is in pending status during the four weeks of participation. There will be a new ACES SOP code for these applications that go over 30 days.

44. **During the four weeks clients need to cure their sanctions, will they receive child care? Any support services? Answer:** Families will receive support while curing sanctions, including child care and support services.
45. **How does the fair hearing process fit with the non-compliance sanction process? Many of our most resistant clients file many fair hearings. Answer:** An individual can file for a fair hearing at any time the department is taking action on their case and they do not agree with the action. The fair hearing process has not changed.
46. **How will we have resources to provide partner staffings for NCS, CE, and ongoing participation issues and still provide day-to-day operations? Answer:** It is anticipated that better engagement strategies including CE will reduce cycling of parents between service providers. In addition, the current reduction in caseload should make time available to work more closely with those remaining on the caseload.
47. **Will non-participation in paternity establishment result in sanction? Answer:** This policy has not changed. Non-participation in paternity establishment would result in a DCS non-cooperation, which has a different penalty than a WorkFirst sanction.
48. **What does the Governor mean about having “an independent third-party review” of the NCS plan prior to implementation? Answer:** The University of Washington has been contracted with to provide an independent review. They have completed their review of the consistency of policies with the Governor’s directive, a review of the literature on sanctions, and have submitted a draft of their work plan to evaluate implementation of the new sanction policies. Copies of the UW’s completed products are available on-line.
49. **Having a protective payee for sanctioned parents was very productive. It gave us a contact each month and a chance to find out more about the family’s barriers that they just wouldn’t share before. Why was this part of the program ended? Answer:** Removing protective payees was suggested a number of times by staff as a possible budget savings. There was no data that supported that payees were effective in engaging clients as a deterrent to entering sanction.

Using a payee just for all families in sanction will discontinue, but for those families who have mismanaged their funds (per WAC 388-460-0035), a payee is still a requirement. The new policy has not changed the requirement of payees for teen parents.

Intensive Services

50. **The CE will surface increased need for intensive services. What plans are being developed to expand the capacity (i.e. more ABE availability)? Answer:** CSD Regional WorkFirst contracts to purchase client services are reviewed at the beginning of each program year to ensure the services we purchase are outcome driven and meet the needs of our WorkFirst population. These efforts will continue into the new program year. The availability of more education activities should be a partnership discussion in your local area if the need to expand capacity exists. The goal of the CE is to engage parents in services that will move them towards employment as quickly as possible. Bundling services to meet full-time participation in work-like activities is encouraged when appropriate.

Headquarters will continue to examine service offerings in conjunction with federal reform of the TANF program.

51. **Why are we providing the CE for individuals who may exit to intensive services? Would it perhaps be more accurate to assess after completion of intensive services? Answer:** The CE process is to develop the most appropriate plan for an individual. There is a benefit to exposing parents to the various options available early in the process. While some individuals will benefit from intensive services, this assessment as well as the core components of the CE will be used to develop the most appropriate plan. Some parents may not be able to complete the CE until other services are provided. This would be a very

small number of parents who meet the criteria of severe emergent issues such as family safety. It is appropriate for these parents to receive intensive services, and then complete the CE when the issues are manageable and they can complete the evaluation.

52. **Based on the CE, if it is determined that the parent needs additional intensive services, then what? What services or resources are available? Answer:** If it is determined that an individual needs additional intensive services, that will become part of their participation and defined in their IRP. We will have the same services available to families as we do now.
53. **To what extent will vocational issues be addressed while the parent is working with a social worker on chemical dependency issues? If parents are referred for CD treatment, how do they fit back into mainstream WorkFirst services when they are ready? Answer:** Vocational issues must be addressed fully while a parent is working with a Social Worker to build new strengths while resolving issues in her or his life. Temporary deferments are necessary and appropriate in some situations. Most parents, however, want to work and may see work as very therapeutic in helping them cope with other concerns. Parents who are deferred part-time from an employment pathway can participate in some level of part-time employment related activities while also addressing other issues that interfere with full-time engagement in an employment pathway. “Bundling” (or combining) activities to find the best mix of activities for each parent is strongly encouraged.
54. **How will ESD’s WorkFirst counselors be trained to interpret the CE results? Answer:** Staff training focusing on the use of specific information and how it relates to the various labor market tools available is scheduled for all ESD WorkFirst staff prior to implementation.
55. **Does the college have to sit down with every customer after CASAS or only customers who want to further their education? Answer:** College staff are expected to have a one-on-one conversation with all parents coming through the CE so they can inform the parents of the various options available to them. The goal is to help parents understand how to address educational barriers that may be preventing them from obtaining a livable wage job.

Bundling Services

56. **Is there more flexibility in service delivery to allow bundled services (classes offered other than quarterly, JS other than 20+ hours)? Answer:** We are always committed to bundling of services as long as it is meaningful and appropriate. The only policy changes being made at this time is to allow 12 months of vocational education. Remember, you always have the opportunity to request an exception to rule if current policy does not allow what you feel may be an appropriate activity for an individual. We expect community colleges to develop strategies to better meet the needs of WorkFirst parents and federal participation requirements.
57. **This new process seems to encourage the “bundling of services”; however, will there be coding in place to avoid interruption of services? Answer:** Yes. “Bundling” (or combining) activities to find the best mix of activities for each parent is strongly encouraged. There are no coding changes to eJAS necessary. Service providers (partner agency or contractor) have access to cases they are working on if the eJAS coding is done correctly.

Job Search

58. **How will ESD handle those parents who are not interested in any of the jobs that they are appropriate for based on the CE? Answer:** Parents will be informed of the local labor market conditions during the CE, as well as options available to them. If there are viable options the parent is right for, they should be explored. However, if the parent does not participate in his or her employment pathway activities, including not showing up to job referrals or not looking for work, staff must discuss the issue with the parent, document the discussion and make the expectations clear to the parent. If the parent chooses not to participate as required, he or she is subject to sanction.
59. **How does giving parents more “choices” up front result in the increase in Job Search we’re expected to produce? Answer:** Parents will engage in activities they have bought into and feel are right for them. The choices enhance the program’s ability to better match the right parent with the right activity.

All activities should be focused on employment, preparing for employment and connecting parents with employment. Refer to the [CE Criteria & Parent Involvement](#) document.

60. **How can we get help in expunging criminal background issues that severely impact employment?**
Answer: Criminal background issues often do impact a parent's employability. The WorkFirst program cannot directly assist in expunging records. However, there are several ways in which the program can help parents with criminal background issues by focusing on employment opportunities that the parent qualifies for, connecting the parent with experts (like Offender Employment Services, OES) who can teach parents to talk with employers and answer specific questions about the issues, encouraging parents to work with the court system by keeping all appointments, etc. Staff training for WorkFirst staff is available through OES.
61. **Has consideration been given to the impact on UI system of flooding it with WorkFirst parents?**
Answer: First of all, we don't agree with the premise that WorkFirst parents will flood the UI system. The policy regarding UI applications was developed in coordination with the UI division. Individuals eligible for UI should not become WorkFirst clients in the first place.

Increased Education

62. **Do we have to use the CASAS test? Is it the only tool we can use? Isn't there an oral appraisal being developed?** **Answer:** Yes, you must use the CASAS tool. The CASAS appraisal is the required test in Washington State for Basic Skills. Additional tests may be used but the CASAS must be used. If, following the CE, a client was sent to a Basic Skills Education pathway, then the CASAS pre-test would be used and other assessment and reporting would occur as required and might include a writing test, oral appraisals, etc. The exception to this is a parent who already has an Associate's Degree, a Bachelor's Degree, an advanced degree or is currently taking, and successfully performing at, college-level classes. However, if a CASAS is not administered, the justification must be documented. Refer to the [CE Standards](#) and [CE Criteria & Parent Involvement](#) document.
63. **Who might benefit the most from vocational training full-time?** **Answer:** It is all dependent on a combination of appropriate aptitude based on previous education and/or high CASAS score, parental interest, local labor market, absence of legal barriers or physical conditions, and available local resources.
64. **How will training opportunities be made available in rural areas that do not have a community college presence? Will video-conferencing options be considered?** **Answer:** Distance education formats are being considered for those parents who are computer literate. Services are still dependent on available resources. Clients living in areas without the presence of a college education and training partner or lack of a locally contracted partner would not have education as an appropriate pathway.
65. **Will all the expanded training and educational opportunities have work requirements attached?**
Answer: For a limited number of parents who meet the criteria, full-time education may be the recommended Employment Plan. These full-time options may be pursued for up to 12 months and include vocational education, I-BEST (Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training), and under certain circumstances, full-time Adult Education. Some education plans will not have work requirements.
66. **CTCs operate on a quarter system. If education is determined to be the best pathway based on the CE, it may be one week to three months before the new quarter begins. What will the parent be required to participate in until class starts? Do they go to Job Search?** **Answer:** Parents must participate in WorkFirst activities on a full-time basis, even when waiting to enter an education or training class. The parent should only be referred to Job Search if Job Search is the best pathway for them based on the CE.

Some local partnerships/communities have developed a menu of participation activities including financial literacy education, Dependable Strengths, transition and orientation classes and specific job skill bundling workshops for parents to take part in until the specific class starts. Other options would need to be developed for parents whose wait time exceeds the four weeks allowable by policy. Refer to the [CE Standards](#) and [CE Criteria & Parent Involvement](#) documents.

67. **What component should parents be placed in if they are waiting to enter an education and/or training pathway and it doesn't start until one, two or more months away?** **Answer:** The component will depend upon the activity the parent is engaged in. Pathway activities are dependent upon local resources. If a parent is working on basic skills during the time prior to the educational activity, for example, the proper component would be BE (coded as a "79" basic education training or other job skills training not directly intended for immediate employment).
68. **If classes aren't offered locally, can we explore resources outside the normal path?** **Answer:** Yes, but all workshops and classes must meet the CE Standards and CE Criteria and meet the WF participation requirements. Available WorkFirst-funded resources are a determining factor in choosing a pathway. Careful consideration must be given to choosing activities outside of the "normal" path. Some private schools, classes and workshops do not meet industry certification standards or basic education requirements and are not available without using WorkFirst resources and funding. The new CE and engagement activities are intended to occur within available resources.
69. **For parents who education and/or training is the best pathway based on the CE, will CJSTs need to be individualized to meet the demands of so many parents coming through the CE process and at all times of week/month?** **Answer:** If CJSTs can be customized to meet the needs of the parent, this is highly encouraged. Customized CJSTs are particularly necessary in rural communities where a whole class cannot be established. However, the significance of group learning is an instructional delivery method and learning environment that must not be underestimated. The most efficient and effective use of TANF Block Grant funding strongly supports cohort instruction rather than the relatively more expensive individualized training plans requiring use of financial aid.

For parents waiting (a reasonable time) for a group CJST to start, other educational activities should be bundled to engage the parent.

70. **Will learning disabilities be screened for during the CE process? How will they be addressed if identified?** **Answer:** Screening for learning disabilities is not a required CE Standard, but can be considered an "enhancement" if your LPA decides it would be important. Enhanced activities that support the CE process are encouraged, but should always be based on local caseload demographics and available resources,

DSHS foundation questions are required by law to include a brief screen for learning needs for required interpreters, translated materials, etc. The CE process itself may not screen for learning disabilities, but clients referred to an education pathway may have additional resources.

71. **What are we going to do with parents whose literacy is at the 6th or 8th grade level based on the CASAS scores? What if they have multiple learning barriers?** **Answer:** The point of the CE is to best identify the pathway that will assist this parent in moving to self-sufficiency. In some cases, basic education is the best pathway; in other cases, local employment is best for parents with low-literacy skills. Some parents may test into Basic Skills but not choose to enter an education pathway.

DSHS has some support services dollars available to do learning evaluations for parents with multiple learning barriers. In addition, some colleges have specialized services for students with multiple barriers.

72. **If parents score low in the CASAS evaluation, what's next for them (i.e. Basic skills or Job Search)?** **Answer:** It will depend on the CE evaluation information, including special records, whether the appropriate participation pathways is Basic Skills, Job Search or a bundling of both activities. Refer to the [CE Standards](#) and the [CE Criteria & Parent Involvement](#) documents.
73. **Can parents get more than one year of education?** **Answer:** It would be allowable that parents spend up to a year in basic education/ESL classes and then enter a CJST or a vocational training program that could take up to another year.
74. **Which CASAS assessment will be used?** **Answer:** The CASAS test is the CE Standard educational assessment tool. Other tools maybe used in addition to the CASAS test. Refer to the [CE Criteria & Parent Involvement](#) document.

75. **What if they have already taken the Compass test? Answer:** Compass is a test for college readiness. CASAS is the required assessment for Basic Skills. Compass, Asset, or other vocational certification tests can be used for those folks who are interested in an education pathway but have a high school diploma or GED and work history that supports this person not needing a basic skills appraisal. The college partner would determine if additional vocational or college testing would benefit the client interested in an education pathway and make that recommendation in the CE.
76. **Will I-BEST programs be considered as appropriate training programs for LEP Pathway parents? Will they be sent to the CTCs to access these programs? Answer:** Contextual basic skills education combined with vocational training are very appropriate choices for many of our WorkFirst parents. Research is very promising that shows ESL students gain language skills more quickly when delivered in a vocational/basic skill integrated program than in traditional standalone ESL classes. WorkFirst or low-income eligible parents can access these programs as available locally.
77. **Is the work requirement going to be taken out of WorkFirst Tuition Assistance program, so that educational opportunities can be broadened to those individuals on WorkFirst who just need certain classes to be job ready and not a full blown training or CJST? Answer:** The work requirement remains the same. Participation requirements must be met. We encourage bundling of services to meet full-time participation, which could include specific classes. WF tuition assistance requirements need to be met but could be used to pay for certain classes.
78. **If we are expanding educational opportunities, are we going to have more resources to pay for tuition, books, etc.? Answer:** No. In fact, the WorkFirst dollars available to the colleges in 06-07 have been reduced by \$1.7 million. However, local colleges have the ability to choose how they allocate their TANF funding. Tuition and books are allowable expenses.
79. **How will the College Block Grant funding be distributed? Answer:** Colleges will continue to have their Block Grant awards distributed on a formula that includes some funds awarded for performance (in brief, how many students were enrolled in CJSTs and how many WorkFirst parents who received any education and training were employed the quarter after they exit their program.) Last year, 80 percent of the block grant was base money and 20 percent performance. The 06-07 year funding will be distributed using a 70/30 ratio, base/performance. The performance measures will be expanded to incorporate the expanded training and education opportunities.
80. **When the new education policy is in place, will parents get a “fresh start,” or will time spent in education to date count against the one year? It’s possible a better evaluation will result in a new more appropriate path – requiring education “again.” Answer:** Policy allows one opportunity in training, so time previously spent in vocational education while on WorkFirst in either VE or VU will count toward the 12-month limit.
- WorkFirst is still about getting people to employment. If someone has received CJST or VE training and been successful in the job market and the current labor market still has employment options, an education and training pathway would not be the best choice. An exception to policy still exists for parents who have previously received training and the CE determines an education and training pathway is the best choice for this client. Parents are allowed up to a year of basic education.
81. **What are the expectations to provide CASAS in rural areas? Colleges in rural areas may/may not provide CASAS or be available to provide CASAS 5 days/week. Answer:** Colleges need to work with their partners and develop options for rural areas. Distance-learning technology may be an option for some parents, where it is available.
82. **We know 40 percent of our clients do not have a GED or diploma. Will we really send them all to school? Answer:** No. Many parents are not interested in an education pathway and seek to enter the labor market. If, after repeated lack of success, retaining employment is an issue and it is believed that a lack of basic skills is the primary issue, clients might be counseled to address this by engaging in some basic skills classes.

83. **Are there any restrictions on HHWD?** **Answer:** HHWD policy remains unchanged. We do want to emphasize, however, that parents must be screened for potential legal barriers that would restrict a parent's success in gaining employment in the field they are trained for.
84. **Does a student's use of one, two, or three quarters to work on Basic Skills or GED count toward their 1-year school limit for plan approval? What about for child care funding?** **Answer:** Parents could potentially participate up to a year of Basic Skills followed by another training activity (I-BEST, CJST or VE), although in most cases the time will be shorter. Support services will remain available as long as participation requirements continue to be met.
85. **What is the future of CJST?** **Answer:** CJSTs remain a viable training option. The colleges will continue to be measured on CJST outcomes. However, we must see a much tighter and closer link with an employment sector and an employer or group of employers. Success is being found in I-BEST CJST opportunities. It is critical to match the parent with the right training program for their one training opportunity. The CE is intended to assist in determining the most appropriate pathway to employment for this parent.
86. **Will all WorkFirst customers that are participating at college, regardless of the program, be counted towards performance measures?** **Answer:** We are in the process of developing the 06-07 Block Grant and are looking at the entire performance issue.
87. **We feel that criminal background checks are very important in educational planning (not just FORS). Can we make agreements with the State Patrol to do these routinely as part of the evaluation process?** **Answer:** WorkFirst can ask questions of parents that are directly related to their training or employment options. For instance, we can ask a parent interested in a nursing program, "Do you have any drug related felonies or convictions?" This is because the question is directly related to the parent's qualifications for jobs in the nursing field. However, it is not appropriate for the program to conduct blanket or routine background checks for every parent.
88. **Please clarify the "post high-school" education timeframe.** **Answer:** Generally, WorkFirst post-secondary training is limited to one year or less. The various training options have different requirements. Refer to the WorkFirst Handbook Chapter 7.
89. **How do we balance the ideas "get customer into flexible short-term training and employment" and "get customers into longer term training that leads to self sustaining wages/careers" with currently available resources?** **Answer:** It is important to consider the resources available. The CE information and criteria for making decisions will help staff match the right parents with the training options available, understanding that the intention is not for all parents to go into training, but for those who could benefit most and move into good jobs to have the opportunity. Refer to the [CE Criteria & Parent Involvement](#) for more information.

Community Jobs

90. **What is the role of CJ in the CE process?** **Answer:** The information gathered during the CE will benefit all partners, including CJ contractors once **WorkFirst** parents are referred. In areas where ESD and SBCTC cannot provide services, CJ contractors may be contracted to provide services. CJ contractors need to work locally with their partners to find ways to support the CE process and overall WorkFirst service delivery.

Additionally, CJ contractors will continue to participate in case staffing to link parents to services provided by CJ contractors, offer valuable programs like Dependable Strengths, soft skills, and upfront job readiness workshops and activities.

91. **Who should be referred to CJ?** **Answer:** CJ continues to be a leader in getting the hardest-to-employ **WorkFirst** families into unsubsidized employment and off **WorkFirst**. The CE Companion document states that referrals will be made only for clients least likely to succeed in attaining unsubsidized employment. Based on the CE, CJ might be an option for those parents that have participated in other activities and have not been successful or where other activities may not be deemed appropriate. This is not a change to current policy. Refer to the [CE Standards](#) and the [CE Criteria](#) documents.

92. **Will funding support increased referrals to CJ? Answer:** Funding in FY 06 for Community Jobs will remain at the level it was for FY 05, except that Sub 2 recently authorized CTED to use funding for the Business Outreach Program that was eliminated as a part of the WorkFirst Re-Examination process (\$300,000 per year) to be added to Community Jobs. This did not increase CTED's budget, but simply allows CTED to reprogram funds from a different category into CJ to serve a small additional number of WorkFirst parents. CJ contractors are still required to manage their contract dollars to ensure that the program is available throughout the program year.
93. **CJ clients that successfully complete CJ but want to go to school rather than work hurt our CJ measure. Is there anything being considered to accommodate this? Answer:** The CJ performance measure continues to be based on obtaining unsubsidized employment. If a parent is enrolled in an education component upon leaving the CJ program and it is not bundled with employment, that parent would not be counted in the performance measure as working. CJ contractors are encouraged to bundle education and training with the CJ program when it is appropriate and support parents' career goals.

LEP Pathway

94. **We have a significant LEP population. How will we ensure they get equitable options and assessments? Will their assessments be of the same quality as the CE? Are we required to track parents during the CE process? If yes, who will track and how will clients be tracked? Answer:** Our LEP partners/providers have been doing comprehensive assessments for LEP clients since the inception of WorkFirst. By providing bilingual and bicultural assessments to the whole family, the providers ensure that the parents are getting equitable information and work closely with other agencies to have access to additional options for training and work. The assessment for the LEP client will have all the same elements as the mainstream WorkFirst program; and, yes, parents will be tracked through eJAS.
95. **Will there be training for LEP providers to do comprehensive assessments for LEP pathway participants? Answer:** The DSHS Refugee and Immigrant Assistance Unit is planning to mirror the training being created by WorkFirst. They are tentatively scheduled to visit all regions in June to assure that the LEP providers are fully trained before the start of the new contracts in July.
96. **Will there be an increase in LEP Pathway funding considering the new program? Answer:** At this time, we have no projection for additional funding, therefore funding levels will remain the same.

Local Area Planning

97. **As an LPA, when can we begin planning and operationalizing CE? What training will be provided and when? Are performance measures being reviewed/revised to accommodate these changes? Answer:** The Partners for Change Meeting was the first day of training on the new WorkFirst reforms. In addition, there will be regional meetings and partnership training across the state. Contact your local LPA Lead and agency representative for information on training opportunities.
98. **How do you foresee LPAs addressing facilities limitations, which could impact their ability to provide the CE? Answer:** Locally, LPA partners will need to work out the logistics of where to offer the elements of the CE. When at all possible, using the WorkSource is recommended. Refer to the [CE Standards](#) document.
99. **How do we as partners leverage separate resources to support the CE, interpretation, staffing, and follow-up? Answer:** LPAs are familiar with the need to leverage resources and staff to meet local program demands. There are no new resources available to support the CE process.
100. **In areas like Region 4 with numerous colleges in each LPA, how will it be decided what college does what and where? Answer:** Locally, LPA partners need to work out which CTC partner(s) will provide the CE Educational Evaluation and how often they will be provided. Refer to the [CE Standards](#) document.
101. **Will there be any LPA innovative funds available? How can we apply? Answer:** LPA funding may still be available on a first come, first served basis. The entire WorkFirst budget, however, is being

reviewed for the 2007 program year. Contact Kelly Lindseth (Kelly.Lindseth@ofm.wa.gov or 360/902-0413) to request funding.

102. **There have been discussions about consistency and standardization of the program. Are local areas going to lose their ability to customize their services? Answer:** WorkFirst has never taken a “cookie cutter” approach to serving low-income families. We will continue to encourage innovation, streamlining, and partnering. We are looking, however, at increasing consistency, accountability, objectivity, and standardization of service delivery statewide. Objective criteria should be consistently applied statewide.

Performance, Accountability and GMAP Issues

103. **When will the GMAP (Government Management, Accountability, and Performance) measures be shared? Answer:** At this time, there are 14 primary measures that have been agreed to by the WorkFirst SubCabinet:

- Caseload
- Diversion Cash Assistance
- Countable Activities
- Full-time Participation
- Sanction Rates (informational only)
- Job Search Placement
- Community Jobs
- Customized Job Skills Training
- High Wage/High Demand Training
- Time to Employment
- Self-Sufficiency Exits
- Exits with Employment
- Working Connections (informational only)
- Child Support

Other measures, such as those related to the Comprehensive Evaluation, will evolve over time. The next SubCabinet GMAP will be June 15. The same measures will be used as in the February GMAP. The latest GMAP report is available at <http://www.workfirst.wa.gov/statestaff/PerformanceMeasures.htm>.

104. **We say this is an individual plan, but we do what is measured. Will targets drive the participation plan for each parent or will the individual’s needs drive the plans that are developed? Answer:** Although budget reductions in recent years have caused some cutbacks to the program, WorkFirst still offers a wide variety of options for low-income parents. With the advent of the Comprehensive Evaluation, it is expected that an individualized plan be developed to help the family move toward self-sufficiency.

Local offices are encouraged to look to their community- and faith-based partners for help in serving WorkFirst families. In addition, you are encouraged to leverage local resources and share promising practices with other areas wherever possible.

105. **How will the partners know that progress is being made toward addressing the \$90 million shortfall in the WorkFirst program? Answer:** Each month, SubCabinet 2 will review data on the program’s GMAP measures. Quarterly, the SubCabinet will host a session. Results of the monthly and quarterly reviews will be posted on the WorkFirst Web site at <http://www.workfirst.wa.gov/statestaff/PerformanceMeasures.htm>.

106. **How will performance measures be adjusted for the lengthened education component? Answer:** There are no plans to change the colleges’ performance measures, as the job placement performance measures for the community colleges are based on the quarter of exit from the program, not when the parent entered the education component.

107. **The completion of the CE process appears to impact our ability to meet the TANF to JS within 30 days. Will this performance measure be reconsidered or changed? Answer:** A number of CE performance measures are being developed to track movement through the CE process, such as the

percent of clients that complete the CE within various timeframes. If information about CE indicates the entry to JS measure needs to be adjusted, we will do so.

108. **Why can't GED completion be counted as an outcome measure?** **Answer:** Completing a GED is a valuable step in contributing to other measures, such as job placement, retention, and increased wages, but does not count for participation as a stand-alone activity. To be counted as a core activity, it must be combined with a work activity. In addition, it is not regularly updated in ACES or eJAS, so would, therefore, not yield accurate data.
109. **Has there been any consideration around developing a college performance measure related to "Life Skills" activities?** **Answer:** While there are numerous value-added activities in the program, we do not measure *everything*. In order to assess the overall performance of WorkFirst at the GMAP level, we must include broad outcome-based measures.
110. **Lengthier training does not support the current performance measure of exits due to self-sufficiency immediately. There will be a lag in time before we can meet this target.** **Answer:** The opportunity for lengthier training should not have a significant impact on the overall measure as only a small number of parents are expected to take advantage of this option due to limited resources and increased performance expectations.
111. **In the past, caseload reduction has been the main thrust behind WorkFirst change and outcomes. Will a new emphasis on "other" WorkFirst strategies (training, Community Jobs, parent choice) change expected WorkFirst outcomes which will allow WorkFirst parents to pursue these goals - even if it means an increase of months on WorkFirst and an increase in cost for WorkFirst?** **Answer:** Work is still the best avenue to break the cycle of poverty. With the advent of the Comprehensive Evaluation and other program improvements, staff and parents will have better information and involvement in developing a plan for parents' participation. As a result, we expect more parents will get and keep jobs, resulting in lower caseloads and program budget stability.
112. **College WorkFirst programs participate in the WorkFirst GMAP. Why don't the rest of the college programs?** **Answer:** Governor's Gregoire's GMAP initiative holds her Executive Branch agency directors accountable. The community and technical college system is not part of the Executive branch of government.
113. **What is being done about conflicting performance measures? Many barriers to employment are not discovered until the parent is in JS.** **Answer:** Every effort has been made to prevent conflicting measures, but sometimes that is difficult with a program as complex as WorkFirst. Improvement to the process, such as the Comprehensive Evaluation, should help staff discover barriers to employment earlier in the process.

General

114. **With a \$90+ million shortfall in the WorkFirst budget, if clients are to be more engaged in activities, where will the money come from to pay for these increases?** **Answer:** It is our responsibility as WorkFirst partners to manage the program and its expenditures prudently as we help low-income parents find jobs and move toward self-sufficiency. To do that, we must place the right parents in the right activity, so the investment will pay off for parents and the program. To correct the current fiscal deficit, each of the WorkFirst agencies has made some cuts. In addition, the Legislature approved the Governor's request for \$50 million to cover the rest of the WorkFirst shortfall.
115. **What does "client choice" mean? How will we balance their choice with the pathways that the partners believe are most effective for them?** **Answer:** The term, "client choice" has left the impression that it is up to the parent to determine in what WorkFirst pathway they will participate. This is a misunderstanding; the more appropriate phrase "parent involvement in decision-making" should be used.

We all respond better when we have input into decisions that affect us – it's human nature. As a result, an essential ingredient of the Comprehensive Evaluation is active participation of parents in the process. Parent involvement in the decision-making process is key to a parent's success.

However, a parent's wishes alone do not substitute for the Comprehensive Evaluation and program pathway criteria. Parent input should not be the sole basis for deciding in what activity a parent will participate. A parent's wishes need to be factored into the larger picture, which includes: family and health issues, education, skills and abilities, labor market, availability of training resources etc.

More information about parental involvement will be discussed in the Comprehensive Evaluation training in April and May. In addition, you may refer to the [CE Criteria & Parent Involvement](#) document.

116. **We are intrigued with Secretary Arnold-Williams' concept of helping people reach their "maximum" level of self-sufficiency. How do we identify those where that level isn't "off WorkFirst"? Answer:** As a partnership, it is our responsibility to provide supports to WorkFirst parents so they can find and keep jobs. Not every parent, however, will be able to get a job and earn enough money to support their family and leave WorkFirst. Federal law, in fact, allows every state to exempt up to 20 percent of their caseload from program participation due to "hardship."

Nearly every parent entering WorkFirst will complete the Comprehensive Evaluation. The results of the Foundation may indicate the parent should be considered "exempt" from the program's requirement, which may include a social services assessment.

It must be emphasized that most parents will go through the complete Comprehensive Evaluation on their way to an employment pathway. As their children grow older, parents need to understand their reliance on the welfare system is time-limited as WorkFirst is only available to families with children living in the home.

117. **How can we teach fiscal responsibility to WorkFirst parents? Answer:** Financial literacy is vital to families moving away from reliance on public assistance. A 2006 legislative proposal (SHB 2394) was signed into law allowing financial literacy to be considered a WorkFirst work activity. Many community colleges and WorkSource Centers offer programs to individuals interested in managing their money, and even saving for big-ticket items like a house or a car. Talk to your local partners about local resources.